



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Public Interest and the Architect

By M. B. MEDARY, JR.

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Fellow, American Institute of Architects

FROM time immemorial mankind has been vaguely conscious of the obligations and responsibilities arising out of the contacts inseparable from social life. Of all ancient written documents, none is more widely known to the Western World than the first book of the Hebrew Scriptures, and in this book the story of the first family life upon the earth develops the question of responsibility for the welfare of others . . . "And the Lord said unto Cain 'Where is Abel, thy brother?' And he said 'I know not. Am I my brother's keeper?'"

All ethical codes and rules of conduct are in some degree attempts to answer Cain's question—a question which increases in its importance to society with the passing of each generation, from the days of the first family group to the infinitely complex relations of men today. It is of increasing importance because the obligation is a cumulative one. Each generation is heir to a richer inheritance from the past and with it is under a greater obligation to the future.

All knowledge which we possess, or which is within our reach, is the gift of the countless minds of past generations, each adding its own contribution and passing it on to the future. This accumulated knowledge is impersonal. It is common property, no matter how great the contribution of an individual or a group in any generation, for these contributions are inspired by and reared upon the foundations slowly built up during the centuries, and represent that part of great lives which remains immortal.

An education should be an effort to grasp the meaning of this vast inheritance, to accept in trust as much of it as we are capable of understanding, to add our own contribution and to deliver it to the future enriched rather than impoverished.

OBLIGATION OF THE PROFESSIONS TO SOCIETY

The professions represent groups of men and women who have chosen special fields of knowledge as the basis of their life-work, and in each of these fields the professional worker finds his subject already developed by the consecutive thought of thousands of predecessors. To take this work of others and sell it for his private gain, adding nothing to it and giving nothing of his special knowledge to the rest of society engaged in other work, is to practise a profession without ethics and without recognition of any obligation to society as a whole, to whom all knowledge belongs.

The so-called "abandoned farms" of New England have been frequently referred to in the past to illustrate the physical effect of appropriating the accumulated natural wealth of the earth without returning anything to the land. Although this wealth reappeared indirectly in stately mansions, facing an avenue which with singular irony was named "Commonwealth," the land had lost its life and could regain its original vitality only after years of effort.

The practice of the professions without the fullest realization of responsibility to society must inevitably react in the same manner, and if the archi-

tectural profession laments the fact that our civilization is not as rich architecturally as the civilizations of Greece and Rome, it is pertinent to inquire how much the students of the architectural history of the past are giving of their knowledge to society as a whole today.

The architectural profession was conscious of this obligation when, in writing its constitution in the middle of the last century, it stated that one of its objects should be "to make the profession of ever-increasing service to society." The declaration of this object remains a challenge to every member of the profession to give of his special knowledge to the community in which he lives and to the world at large.

The bad housing of the very poor—through ignorance of the basic principles of good planning and sanitary requirements, or by reason of the unregulated selfishness of the speculator in land and building operations—is, in the last analysis, chargeable to those who, by their special training and knowledge, know the dangers to a community resulting from such conditions and, while guarding their private clients against these dangers, have failed in their clear duty to use their knowledge for the benefit of the whole community and to keep the public informed in the means of correcting such conditions. Every community has the right to demand that public service from its architects which will influence its physical development, in the same manner as it expects and demands from the medical profession protection from the consequences of ignorance of medical laws.

PECULIAR ARCHITECTURAL RESPONSIBILITY

The enormous economic losses and the great cost of living in congested cities (due largely to the physical an-

archy resulting from lack of planning or zoning) cannot be contemplated by those who have been specially trained in planning without the sense of a direct responsibility to the public for leadership in any movement which will ameliorate these conditions. The architectural profession knows that the planning of a city and the orderly arrangement of its activities is as necessary as the planning and arrangement of the activities of a house, a hotel or a department store, and that the consequences of failure in these matters are multiplied a thousand-fold in the case of our cities. It is the duty of the profession to make it clear to the people of a city that, while they as individuals demand that the various functions of their homes shall be arranged in proper relation to each other, it is of still greater importance to them collectively that the various functions of their collective home, the city, shall be arranged with the same foresight.

Can the architect of today contemplate without a sense of responsibility the utilitarian structures of our present civilization? Can he compare the bridges which span our streets and rivers, in the city and country, with those of older civilizations without feeling that his profession has given too little of its time to inform and influence the rest of society? And, in the matter of design, can he compare the popular acceptance of the design of today with the popular demand of the people of Athens, Rome, Pompeii or Florence without feeling an immense obligation to give more of his knowledge to society in the public interest?

The architecture of the United States up to the beginning of the nineteenth century indicated an understanding public. It was the individual struggle for material gain during the nineteenth century, progressing contemporaneously with the development

of quick and easy communication with the four quarters of the earth, which brought us to its close with no understanding demand from the public to guide the architectural development of the day. Colleges and universities throughout the country were giving their degrees to graduates without having acquainted them with the meaning of the Fine Arts to civilization. Architects, sculptors and painters were serving only a limited few and were conscious of a great gulf between themselves and the public. The work of our few sculptors was rarely seen outside of galleries, and if we compare this work with that patronized by the public, such as the Civil War monuments in every city, town and hamlet, we realize that commercialism had supplanted art in the patronage of the public. This was equally true of architecture and all the arts and crafts. The designers of furniture, decorations and household fixtures and utensils of every kind rarely had any training in the schools of art.

ORGANIZED ATTACKS ON ARTISTIC ILLITERACY

These conditions have been changing for the better in recent years. The World's Fair at Chicago marked the beginning of a public understanding of the larger meaning of architecture, and the group of men who were responsible for the planning of that work also succeeded in arousing a public understanding of the great importance of the original plan of the National Capitol, which was rapidly being lost beyond redemption through public ignorance

of its meaning or even of its existence, as a fundamental upon which the future of the Capitol depended for its dignity and distinction.

The influence of this same group is perpetuated today in the National Fine Arts Commission and in the city planning and art commissions which are now functioning in many states and cities throughout the country.

In more recent years the American Institute of Architects has secured the interest of a number of colleges and schools in the proposal to add a course in the understanding of architecture to their curricula, this course to be quite apart from the technical courses offered to those expecting to practise architecture as a profession. The profession is awake to its responsibility in many lesser ways and believes that the public understanding is already well on its way out of the artistic illiteracy which marked the lowest ebb of the nineteenth century. We are still, however, *Between the Old World and the New* (if I may borrow the title of Guglielmo Ferrero's very interesting book), and, to borrow from its substance, we have broken through the limitations which made a standard of public judgment possible in the ancient world. We are now rioting in our freedom from any limitations and have not yet fully appreciated the necessity of having new limitations. In short, we do not yet know whether New York is ugly or beautiful.

The profession will have grasped its full responsibility only when every member of it recognizes in the public interest his first and greatest obligation.